

## **Council – 30 July 2020**

### **Item 8. Questions from members of the public**

#### **4. Question from Mr. M. Beecher**

"How does the Council propose to recover the £4.5 million loss in revenue following the 18-month rent deferral agreed in secret with 'WeWork' and further losses from other rent deferrals?"

#### **5. Question from Mrs. C. Nichols**

Covid 19

Nationally published pillar1 and 2 data shows that Spelthorne continues to experience occasional Covid 19 positive cases. Covid 19 will flare up again in the Autumn without effective test and trace, face masks across all age groups in crowded public spaces as well as enclosed spaces, and discipline in following separation distances.

September will present vulnerable residents with a particular challenge when children – the older ones of whom are thought to be a vector for Covid 19 transmission – return to school. This is a particular problem in Lower Sunbury where thousands of children discharge onto Green Street during term time.

Spelthorne has worked tirelessly to help the community through its Support4Spelthorne scheme. However, the Borough Bulletin gives no indication of a role for the Council in emerging local test and trace programmes although this is the level of local government that is very well informed as to where residents are located.

How is Spelthorne working with Surrey's public health department to ensure that residents have regular up-to-date information on where the local flare ups are occurring? When can residents expect to receive an information leaflet on a multi-agency action plan for control of Covid 19 as it applies to Spelthorne?

#### **6. Question from Mr. P. Hollingsworth**

"Can the Council please outline what steps are being taken to defend our Green Belt, local Democracy, and our Finances from gross mismanagement?"

We as a community, at least 6,000 or so, signed a petition to stop GB development.

Since the outset of COVID, it has become even more important for our mental and physical health to enjoy our green spaces. If you are a democratic body, SBC, you will not have this "under review" but listen to our wishes. You may come and go but our GB stays. For future generations.

And how may I ask will you defend SBC's financial position given rental deferrals that have put a hole in the budget, the result of an unwise debt-funded property frenzy?"

#### **7. First Question from Ms. M. Mulowska**

"I understand that the former Council leader Cllr Ian Harvey (during whose time as leader the current draft local plan was developed) believes that a Brownfield First Policy could protect all our Green Belt sites for the duration of the next local plan i.e. for the next 5 years. Is the new administration and Council leadership going to take this to heart and remove all Green Belt sites from the draft local plan considering the huge amount of opposition to Green Belt release?"

#### **8. Second Question from Ms. M. Mulowska**

"In July 2016, Spelthorne Borough Council passed a motion stating that 'the Green Belt in Spelthorne is considered sacrosanct'. If this is the case, why then does the current local plan seek to release 19 Green Belt sites including two sites in Stanwell for warehouses?"

#### **9. Question from Ms. D Pratley**

"Have any of the 19 Green Belt sites been removed from the Draft Local Plan?"

#### **10. Question from Mrs. S. Doerfel**

Spelthorne Borough Council held a Council meeting on 21st July 2016. In that meeting, 2 Councillors proposed the following motion: "The Green Belt in Spelthorne is sacrosanct. This Council confirms that there is no intention whatsoever to allow development of the Green Belt." Let's call this "the Green Belt motion."

That motion was accepted by the Council to be put on the Council Meeting agenda to be debated and voted upon in the Council Meeting on 21st July 2016.

At the Council Meeting of 21st July 2016, 2 other Councillors proposed an amendment to the Green Belt motion to effectively qualify it in a "yeah, but subject to relevant policies and the Special Circumstances caveats" kind of way.

The Council nonetheless debated the Greenbelt motion and carried it - the result was that the Council "Resolved that the Green Belt in Spelthorne is considered 'sacrosanct'. This Council affirms that it will continue to apply its Green Belt planning policies as laid out in the Local Plan and any relevant PPGs (Planning Policy Guidance) from central government. Any inappropriate development on the Green Belt will only be approved if the applicant can demonstrate acceptable 'Very Special Circumstances' as to why it should be approved"

Cambridge dictionary defines "sacrosanct" as meaning "thought to be too important or too special to be changed."

Even with the amended version of the 2016 Greenbelt motion which was carried, the Council did nothing to actually refuse or amend the wording of "sacrosanct" - what the council did was replace the part of it which referred

to no intention to allow development on Greenbelt with the qualification appended to the "sacrosanct" part and eventually carried it.

Cambridge dictionary defines "protect" as meaning "to keep someone or something safe from injury, damage or loss." This is a much lower threshold and standard than "sacrosanct" whose meaning is unequivocal.

In February 2020 the Council was compelled to debate a Petition which asked the Council in summary not to release the 19 Greenbelt sites identified in the Local Plan for development, and to protect Greenbelt in Spelthorne. Despite consensus and speeches that nobody wanted to build on Greenbelt and that it should be protected, the Council voted to merely note the petition and keep it under review.

Given the intervening pandemic and implications of COVID19 which represents a massive change in circumstances and underlines the need for greater environmental protections such that it begs the question whether the current Local Plan remains either current or local, and given the Council is obliged to make good on its resolution regarding the Greenbelt Petition per the February 2020 council meeting:

1. why can't the Council now debate or commit in a Council Meeting as it did in 2016, to protect Spelthorne's Greenbelt, even if such commitment is subject to the same kind of caveat or amendment as the motion in 2016?
2. if the Council can do so, when will it do this and why has it not been done already?
3. If the Council feels it cannot do so, then was it wrong or acting unlawfully when it did so in 2016?
4. Does the Council consider the word "protect" be more restrictively binding than the word "sacrosanct" including if qualified by the caveat which enabled the 2016 Greenbelt motion to be carried?